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April 11, 2003

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Chairman
Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
H-143, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515-6022

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
H-143, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515-6022

Dear Chairman Walsh and Ranking Member Mollohan:

I am writing to respectfully request $1 million in the Community Development Fund, economic development initiatives account within the FY2004 Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations bill for Rice University and the institutions in the Texas Medical Center.

On an almost daily basis, we learn of new discoveries in molecular medicine that hold the promise of improvements in diagnosis and treatment of human diseases. Yet, the harvesting of these opportunities will require cooperative efforts by teams of researchers whose specialties range from basic research to drug development or clinical applications. In order to facilitate the kind of cooperative and interdisciplinary work that is required to expedite the development of new therapies, Rice University and the institutions of the Texas Medical Center will cooperate in a planning project to develop a centralized facility to support joint biomedical research activities.

For over thirty-five years, Rice University and the major research institutions of the Texas Medical Center have cooperated in joint research and educational programs, including the development of an artificial heart, bioengineering, neuroscience, applied computation, and public policy. At present Rice/Texas Medical Center partnerships encompass more than 90 programs. These collaborative efforts have brought together the expertise and capabilities of a leading medical research center with the talents of basic and applied scientists and engineers at a leading research university. Building on this past synergism, faculty from Rice and the Texas Medical

Center will come together in a modern research laboratory designed to facilitate and optimize collaborative and multi-disciplinary activities in areas at the leading edge of biomedical research.

This facility, which will be located adjacent to the Rice campus yet in the heart of the Texas Medical Center, will provide more than 300,000 square feet of space for research that will combine the talents of investigators from Rice University and the Texas Medical Center. Using the diverse sciences of molecular and clinical medicine, bioengineering and biotechnology, this cooperative research will involve an array of hospitals, medical schools, and universities, all leading to discoveries of new diagnoses and therapies.

The proposed project will develop plans to construct a biomedical research facility bringing together researchers from Rice University and Texas Medical Center institutions in a shared facility, creating multidisciplinary and inter-institutional teams to carry out research leading to advances in biomedicine and drug development.

The contact for Rice University is Dr. Jordan Konisky, Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies, Rice University, Vice Provost Research and Graduate Studies MS13, Houston, Texas 77005, phone number 713.348.4002.

I am writing in support of a request for $2.5 million in the National Aeronautics Space Administration Academic Programs account within FY2004 Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations bill for the Texas Engineering and Technical Consortium (TETC).

TETC is a partnership between the State of Texas, higher education institutions, and private companies. TETC directs grants to eligible higher education institutions in order to increase the number of electrical engineering and computer science graduates, creates technical research and degree programs, and encourages collaborative efforts between related academic programs and the private sector. Within the decade, TETC hopes to double the number of bachelor of science graduates in electrical engineering and computer science from Texas universities and increase collaboration between private companies and universities with electrical engineering and computer science departments. The TETC model was designed to be replicated easily in other states, thus becoming a national model.

TETC functions as a pilot program to attract underrepresented segments to technical disciples, emphasizing recruitment of students from groups or backgrounds that are traditionally underrepresented in the fields of engineering and computer science, including female students and Hispanic and African American students. TETC has outreach and recruitment programs targeting students in high school, junior college, community college, and technical school. Increasing the number of competent engineering and computer science graduates by investing in a strong, well-trained workforce today will ensure that there are enough graduates for companies to hire in the future without relying as heavily on foreign talent as was necessary during the late 1990s.

Dollar for dollar state matching funds ($2.7 million) triggered by $2.7 million in contributions from seven companies - Advanced Micro Devices, Applied Materials, Hewlett-Packard, Intel,

Motorola, National Instruments, Texas Instruments, and Sabre-AeA - created an initial pool of $5.4 million in funding. For the two years of the first round of grants, with about one-third of the potential funding developed, participating universities projected a thirteen per cent increase in enrollment in the critical fields of electrical engineering and computer science.

For the first biennium of grant funding, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board established peer review panels with out-of-state expert review teams to evaluate fifty-five proposals from thirty-four universities. Through the merit-based evaluation process, thirty-three of those proposals were funded using the pool. Of the thirty-three proposals funded, twenty-three universities (thirteen computer science departments and sixteen electrical engineering departments) received funding. Each program has very specific metrics to evaluate progress toward the goal.

This request will fully leverage the resources that the state and private sector have committed to the TETC program. These critical funds will enable TETC to achieve its goal of substantially increasing the output of engineers and computer scientists from Texas universities, with the need of doubling the number of graduates by the end of this decade.

The contact for TETC is John C. Halton III, Executive Director, Texas Engineering and Technical Consortium, The University of Texas at Austin, Engineering Foundation, 1 University Station C2104, Austin, Texas 78712-0287, phone number 512.471.2120.

My staff contact is Alicia Lee, phone number 202.225.2571.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

John Culberson
Member of Congress